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## **Libertarians mount spirited defense as Clinton threatens liquor ads on TV**

*Proposed ban is an attack on free speech and free trade*

WASHINGTON, DC — Bill Clinton's threat to ban TV ads for hard liquor is an attack on two principles that made America great, the Libertarian Party says: Free speech and free trade.

"Politicians can't declare the First Amendment null and void simply because businesses want to advertise something they dislike," said Steve Dasbach, the party's national chairman. "In a free-market economy, advertisers should have the right to advertise their products free from harassment by government officials."

Dasbach was responding to Clinton's threats earlier this week to prohibit hard liquor ads from appearing on television. Clinton directed bureaucrats at the Federal Communications Commission to "study" what effect liquor ads on TV might have on underage drinking.

The Distilled Spirits Council ended its voluntary 50-year policy of abstaining from broadcast advertising in 1996. Ironically, however, the four major TV networks announced they won't run hard liquor ads.

"We respect the decision of the networks *not* to run liquor ads. If they think such ads are inappropriate, they have the right to *refuse* them," Dasbach said.

"Likewise, the government should respect the networks' right to accept liquor advertising — or advertising for any other legal product."

At stake is the Constitutional right of free speech — in this case, commercial speech.

"The First Amendment doesn't say Bill Clinton has the right to run TV advertisements, but Jim Beam doesn't," noted Dasbach. "Advertising deserves the same Constitutional protection as other speech. In fact, just as free, robust *political* speech allows democracy to thrive, free, robust *business* speech — advertising — allows the economy to survive. In both cases, such advertising allows consumers to make more educated choices."

Clinton also ignores the fact that consumers have ultimate veto power, Dasbach said.

"If consumers don't approve of liquor ads, they won't buy the products — and the ads will cease. If consumers stop watching the TV networks that broadcast liquor advertisements — the ads will cease. Consumers don't need Bill Clinton and the FCC to protect them from liquor ads. In a free-market system, they have the greatest power of all: *Economic power*."

"Perhaps it's time for politicians to take a good sober look at their own bad habits — and leave liquor companies, consumers, and the First Amendment alone."

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